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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 001076

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARPI AND S/CT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2015

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [KMDR](#) [PINR](#) [KU](#) [ISLAMISTS](#)

SUBJECT: EXTREME ISLAMIST JABER AL-JALAHMA SHARES WORLDVIEW
IN RARE INTERVIEW WITH KUWAITI DAILY

REF: A. 04 KUWAIT 1731

[B](#). 04 KUWAIT 1661

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: Extreme Sunni Islamist Jaber Al-Jalahma, a frequent subject of questioning by state security officials for his links to militants and for preaching violent jihad, granted an unusual and exclusive interview to the Daily Star, which ran in the March 12 edition of the Kuwaiti English-language newspaper. During the interview, he spoke out about the recent shoot-outs in Kuwait between security forces and terrorists, the incompatibility of Islam and democracy, his opposition to women's political rights, and the incendiary provocation caused by the presence of U.S. military forces in the Gulf. Al-Jalahma, a hardline Islamist with militant links, was most recently questioned by state security last summer in a case involving Kuwaiti youths apprehended in Syria en route to Iraq. END SUMMARY.

"Islam Firmly Against Attacking Any Unarmed Person"

[1](#)2. (U) Hardline Islamist Jaber Al-Jalahma granted an unusually candid interview to the Daily Star, a Kuwaiti English-language daily, in early March. According to the reporter who noted the considerable difficulty in obtaining the meeting, the interview with Al-Jalahma took place in the diwaniya of Osama Al-Munawer, a well-known attorney and defender of Islamists accused of jihad and related activities. The interviewer described the session as punctuated by long periods of silence, after which Al-Jalahma responded to many questions saying, "I do not want to speak on this issue."

[1](#)3. (U) Al-Jalahma began by speaking about the recent shootouts and about the acceptable use of violence. Al-Jalahma said that the recent violence in Kuwait, in which four security officers and eight militants were killed, was a result of "the passion felt by a few young men," and said that "I am against the way in which these young men chose to deliver their message." However, he found equal fault with state security for their alleged physical abuse of prisoners, and claimed that he had been the victim of torture at their hands.

[1](#)4. (U) Islamic scholars and Kuwaitis who have traveled to wage jihad in Afghanistan should be in charge of looking after the next generation, Al-Jalahma said. He pointed to Hamed Al-Ali, an ex-Awqaf employee and former Secretary General of the Salafi Movement and frequent target of security interrogations for his alleged role in supporting jihad, as a fine example for young Kuwaitis. "The involvement of Hamed Al-Ali in Kuwaiti society is a valve of security for Kuwait," he said. Al-Jalahma also said that Kuwaiti youths should not go to Iraq to wage jihad "without the permission of a Kuwaiti religious scholar."

[1](#)5. (U) Al-Jalahma parsed his words just as carefully in discussing the issue of when attacks might be permissible. "We should differentiate between attacking military and civil targets, given that the latter is forbidden according to Islamic teaching. Islam is firmly against attacking any unarmed person," he said -- even Ariel Sharon, were he to visit an Islamic country. Al-Jalahma did not comment further on attacks against military targets, an action implicitly approved in his statement. (Note: The Kuwaitis killed in recent incidents and those apprehended in the resulting sweep were suspected of plotting attacks on military targets such as convoys. End Note.)

Islam Incompatible With Democracy

[1](#)6. (U) Al-Jalahma bluntly stated his belief in the incompatibility of Islam and democracy. "The democratic system contradicts Islamic teachings," he said. A democracy rests power with the public, he said, "while in Islam, the Sharia (Islamic Law) is the divine source of power." Al-Jalahma then called into question the participation of Islamists in Parliament (note: Islamists of various strains maintain a majority in the body), saying their efforts to reform the assembly had gotten nowhere, and that their

efforts would therefore be better spent "in humanitarian work and in spreading Islam."

17. (U) On the issue of women,s political rights, Al-Jalahma said that it was not permitted on religious grounds, although Islam does permit women to express their opinions "in an informal way... indoors." Al-Jalahma said that he suspected the government,s timing in renewing its push for women,s suffrage was aimed at pressuring the Islamists and sending them a message in the wake of the shootouts. Al-Jalahma said that were women to be granted their rights, "the Islamic groups will allow the women in their circle to vote, but not to run for Parliament."

"I Hope The American Forces In Kuwait Will Soon Leave"

18. (U) The presence of American "occupiers" in the region and their conduct is the primary reason for the unrest among Arab youths, Al-Jalahma said, "especially after they saw the torture being carried out by American soldiers against Iraqi citizens." Al-Jalahma characterized the U.S. presence in the region as "imposing democracy by force and occupying some Islamic countries," and called it "unacceptable." "I understand the anger of the Kuwaiti youth that stems from the American presence, especially as it is accompanied by countless killings of Muslims in Iraq and Palestine." An Islamist Espousing Intolerance With Militant Links

19. (U) Jaber Al-Jalahma is a prominent Sunni Islamist cleric with known links to violent extremists, however he rigorously avoids the public eye and rarely appears in the press. He was tried in November 2002 for broadcasting propaganda and praising two extremists, Anas Al-Kandari and Jassem Al-Hajiri, for shooting and killing a U.S. Marine on October 8, 2002 on Failaka Island. Al-Jalahma was accused of publicly describing the attack as legitimate and heroic at the funeral of the two assailants who were also killed during the attack. Al-Jalahma defended his actions saying that his message was intended for the grieving families of the two dead attackers.

10. (S) According to many accounts of his statements at the funeral, Al-Jalahma said the attack "was a message to us all," and said the two Kuwaitis "were better than us because they stood up against infidels bent on usurping our rights." He was acquitted of all charges in December 2002. The court ruled that Al-Jalahma had merely expressed his opinion and did not pose a threat to military preparations to defend Kuwait. Al-Jalahma later admitted to EmbOff (ref A) that he had been wrong to praise the Failaka attackers despite still characterizing their intentions as "righteous." Al-Jalahma also admitted knowing Usama bin Laden, whom he refers to as "Shaykh Usama," meeting him in Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s, where he claims to have provided only humanitarian aid. Al-Jalahma also claimed to have made a "deal" with UBL in Kandahar and received a promise that Al-Qaida would leave Kuwait alone (ref A).

11. (C) In recent years Al-Jalahma has been arrested or detained in Kuwait and several other Arab countries including Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and the UAE. Yemeni authorities arrested Al-Jalahma for having "extremist beliefs" in October 2003 while he was trying to depart Sana'a by airplane. In the summer of 2004, Al-Jalahma was detained in Saudi Arabia and was eventually transferred to a prison in Riyadh. The Saudis reportedly held him on suspicion of involvement in recruiting Kuwaitis to fight coalition forces in Iraq. Al-Jalahma was purportedly detained, questioned, and charged by the Kuwaiti public prosecutor in August 2004 for allegedly recruiting jihadi fighters for combat in Iraq. It was reported that Al-Jalahma was handed over to Kuwaiti authorities by Saudi security officials. He denied the charges and was released in November 2004 without trial. He has been a vocal critic of Kuwait State Security (KSS), which he accused of torturing him and numerous young Kuwaitis, motivating them to further acts of violence.

12. (C) A well-connected liberal Embassy contact informed EmbOffs that after the shoot-outs between militants and security officials in January, KSS director Shaykh Athbi Al-Fahd Al-Sabah telephoned Al-Jalahma and fellow firebrand Islamist cleric Hamad Al-Ali to tell them to "calm things down." It has been asserted by some Embassy contacts that Shaykh Athbi uses the two extremist clerics as go-betweens to communicate with Islamic militants.

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